

Bison Cow Hunt Orientation



Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

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Once Upon A Time



The Henry Mountain bison herd was transplanted from Yellowstone National Park to the San Rafael Desert in 1941. Fifteen cows and three bulls were released on the San Rafael Desert. The three bulls abandoned the herd and five more bulls were transplanted the following year. The herd then moved to the Burr Desert and later began to use the Henry Mountains.



Moving the buffalo in 1941

Law enforcement

Any bison hunter that accidentally or otherwise kills the wrong sex or kills extra buffalo has the obligation of salvaging the animal and reporting the incident to DWR law enforcement

IMMEDIATELY. Failure to do this may result in felony criminal charges. If you kill the wrong sex, clean the animal and move it to a location where it will not spoil. Then call one of the numbers listed below, starting with Price Dispatch. If there is no answer, please leave a message including phone numbers and contact information so an officer can get in touch with you.

Price Dispatch 435-637-0893

Lt Carl Gramlich 435-820-6011

Investigator Roger Kerstetter 435-820-6013

Sgt J Shirley 435-220-0526

TJ Robertson 435-820-6015

Paul Washburn 435-820-6016

Patience is Key



(Bull left, cow right)

The longer you watch a bison the better your chances for gathering enough clues to determine its sex. Take the time to learn the identifying characteristics described in this course. It is very important to use all the characteristics to avoid shooting a bull.

Identifying Characteristics

Cow	Mature Bull	Yearling Bull
Penile sheath missing	Penile sheath present	Penile sheath may not be visible
Horns thin at base	Horns heavy at base	Horn thickness intermediate
Horns curve inward	Horns have less inward curve but there are exceptions to this.	Horns jut out at an angle
Head narrow	Head broad, triangular dark and wooly	Head intermediate
Body smaller less muscular	Body large, stocky and muscular	Body smaller less muscular
Neck noticeable	Shoulder and head seem to merge, no neck	Neck noticeable

Remember there are exceptions to every characteristic so use several to make your determination.

For cows look specifically for:

- 1) The absence of a penile sheath
- 2) Horns that are thin at the base
- 3) Horns curving inward. However realize that some bulls have highly curved horns. Use the basal diameter of the horn to help judge.

Stay away from:

- 1) Heavy horns
- 2) Horns with no inward curve
- 3) Horns that jut out at an angle

Young bulls are sometimes mistaken for cows. Their horns are beginning to curve and the base circumference is similar to that of older cows. Remember take your time and don't take chances.



This bull is between 1 and 2 years old



This bull is between 2 and 3 years old and was taken on the cow hunt because it had curved horns. Use all the identifying characteristics before pulling the trigger



Mature cow bison

Horn Growth

HORN GROWTH IN THE BUFFALO

Both sexes of buffalo start their horn growth soon after birth and the horns continue to grow throughout the life span. These sketches indicate what you may expect to see in the different age groups. The horns are fairly straight through the first year and begin curving up and in as age progresses.

The horns of the bulls have a much larger base circumference than those of the cow with a general more massive appearance.

The cow's horns show less taper with a more constant circumference along the horn length. The cow will also show a sharper curve to the horn with some older cows making almost a half circle.

As the animals become older, the horns show a wrinkling and roughening near the horn base in a growth ring fashion. Old bulls horns will often be worn and split as a result of years of doing the things that a bull buffalo can do with these very effective tools.



CALF



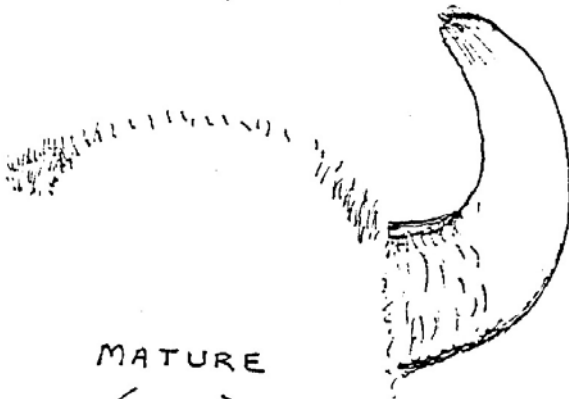
YEARLING



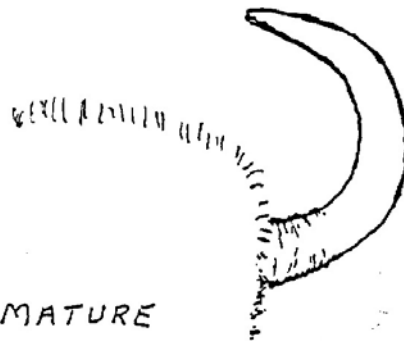
2 YEARS



PRIME



MATURE
(BULL)



MATURE
(COW)

The Cows



Although this cow does not have horns that curve inward, notice the narrow face and noticeable neck and thin bases of the horns.

The Cows



This cow has the classic thin horns that curve inward and the narrow face. The head is also less wooly than a mature bull's.

The Cows



Although this is clearly a cow this would not be a good shot the calf is behind her and could be injured if the bullet passes through.

The Cows



Same cow calf still behind her and still no shot.

The Cows



Left to Right: Calf, Bull, Cow. Notice the difference in horn curvature and thickness between the bull and the cow, as well as the wooly face on the bull.

The Cows



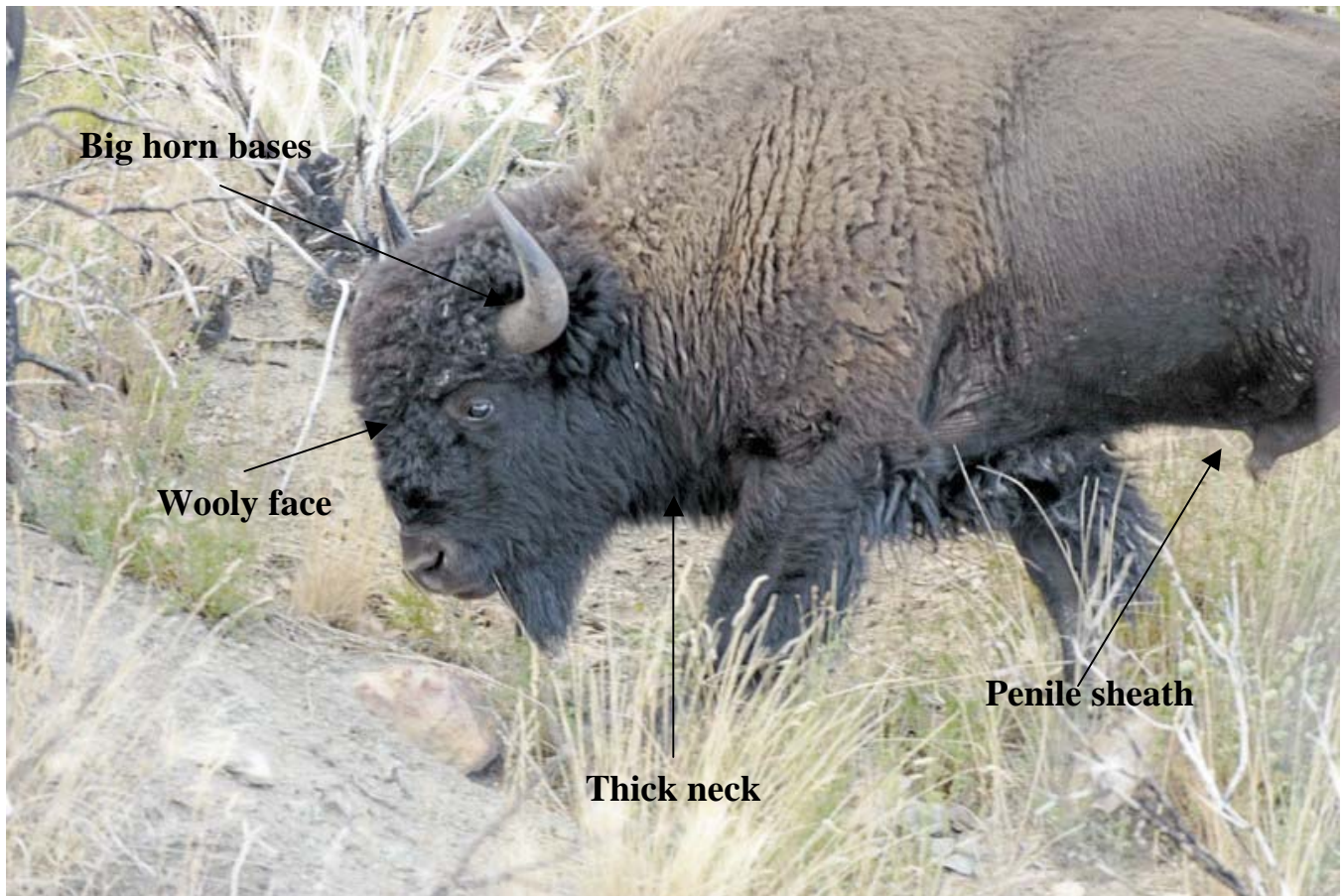
The view of this cow is obscured by vegetation. Make sure you have a clear view of all the characteristics described above before deciding to shoot.

The Cows



The face is somewhat woolly but narrow. Notice the curvature of the horns

The Bulls



This picture depicts some of the characteristics that will help you identify a bull bison.

The Bulls



This picture clearly shows the horn characteristics of a bull approximately 3-4 yrs, notice the big horn bases and the curvature of the horns (curve up, not inward). There is individual variation in size and curvature of horns, some bulls have a much more inward curve.

The Bulls



Bulls often have these very dark looking heads. Notice the size of the horns and the wooly head. When looking at a cow with a very dark head use all the identifying characteristics to be sure it is not a bull.

The Bulls



Notice the narrow face and not so wooly head, yet you can see it is a young bull. The angle of view makes it look like the horns curve in like a cow. This is a very good example of why you need to take your time, get different views, and use all the identifying characteristics before making your decision.

The Bulls



The Bulls



Young bull on right, possible cow on left. Don't take chances, let young bison go!

The Bulls



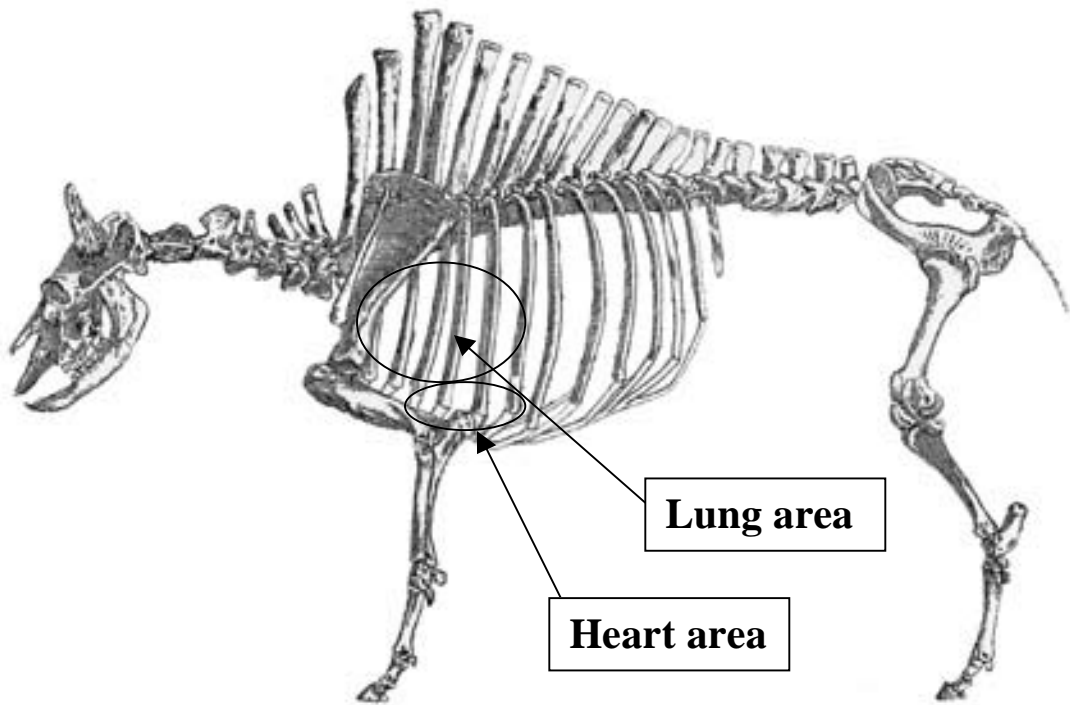
This is a young bull but notice the face is not wooly and is narrow. The base of the horns are similar to that of a mature cows. This is why young bulls are mistaken for cows, be patient when making your decision to shoot.

The Bulls



Shot Placement

Note the vertebrae on the bison skeleton which makes up the 'hump'. This will give you an idea where the vitals are. Don't shoot too high.



Shot Placement

Shoot or Don't Shoot

This is a bull so don't shoot.



Don't set your sights on anything that looks like this bull.

The bull has moved his leg forward and exposed the heart area. The lung area is the largest vital area to shoot.

Shot Placement



This would be a good shot except for the buffalo laying down behind this cow.

Shoot or Don't Shoot



There is a shot at the cow in the upper center.

Shoot or Don't Shoot



These are about the size of the calves that you will see, possibly a little larger and darker. Don't take chances shooting at a calf.

Shoot or Don't Shoot



Wait, no shot here

Shoot or Don't Shoot



The cow bottom center is moving into the herd, this is not a good shot. The cow to the right is grazing and this would be a clear shot. If you see a different cow that you want to take be patient until you have a clear shot.

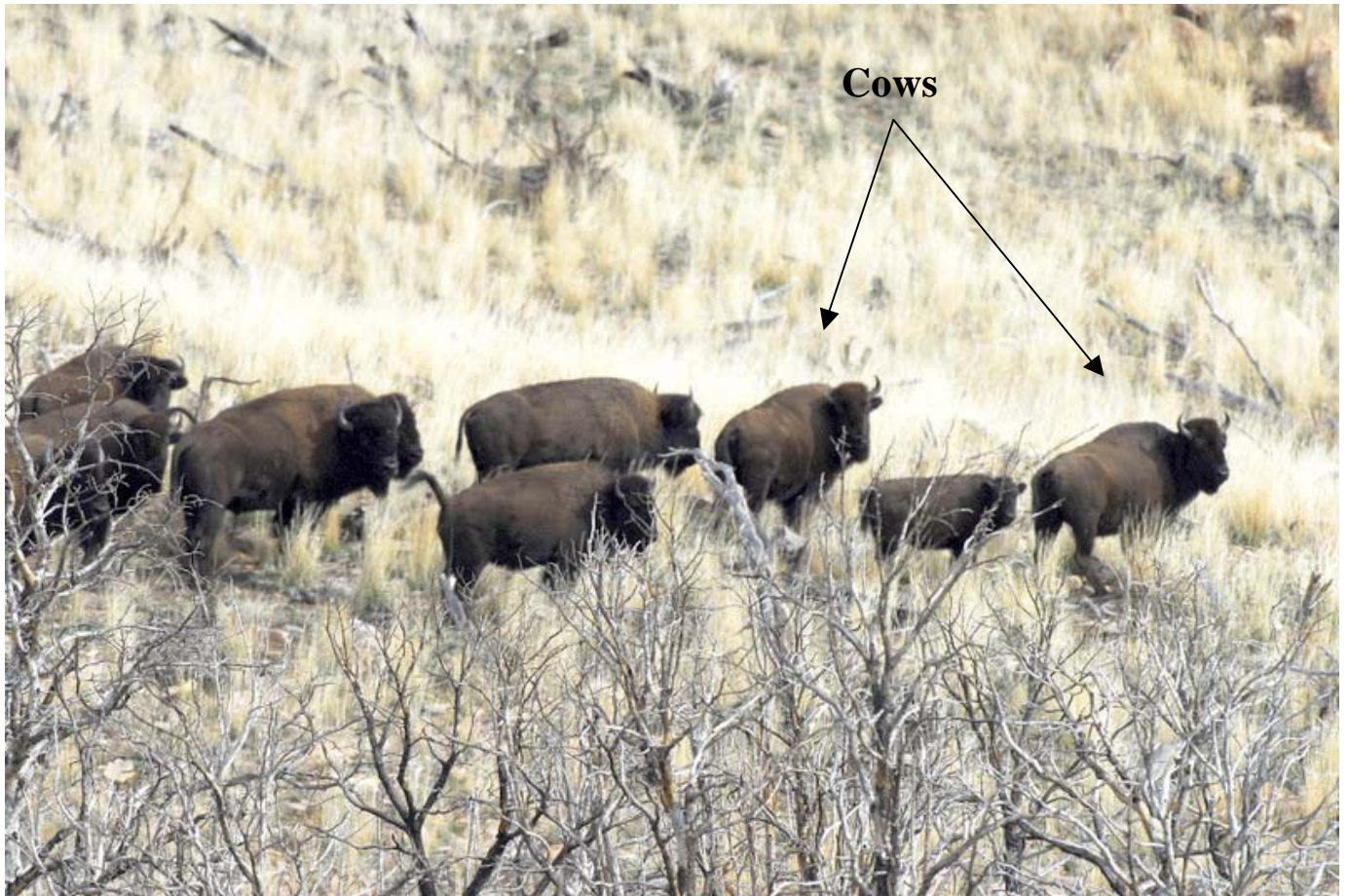
Shoot or Don't Shoot



No shot here but eventually with patience you would expect to have one.

FYI- A few years ago a hunter shot at a buffalo in a herd, the buffalo moved and mixed in with the others. Believing the shot missed a second shot was taken, again the same thing happened. A third shot was taken at a different buffalo, when the herd moved away there were three dead buffalo. When you shoot at a buffalo don't shoot in a herd. Make sure you keep a visual of the buffalo you shot at. It might not be evident that you made a hit but it is critical that you keep with the same buffalo until it goes down. They can travel a long distance wounded.

Shoot or Don't Shoot



This would make for a good shot

Shoot or Don't Shoot



Clear shot here

Shoot or Don't Shoot



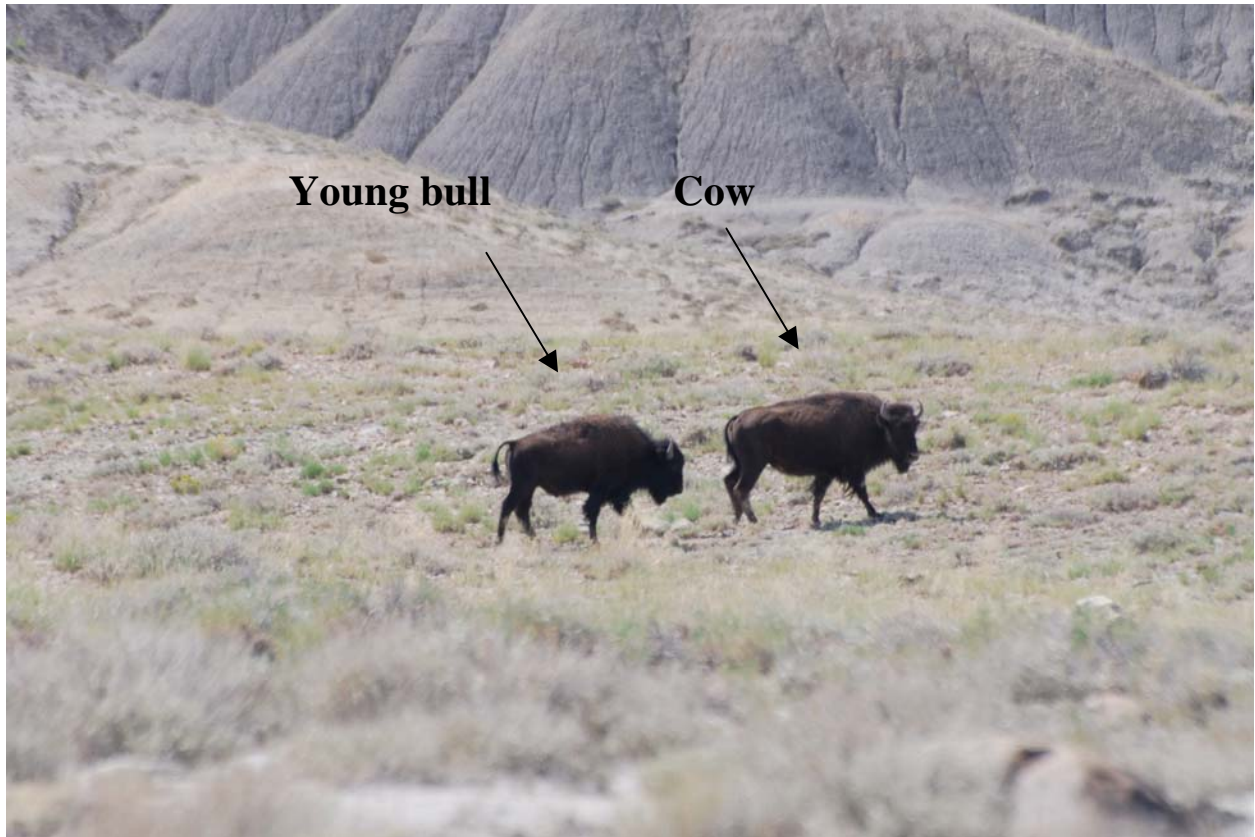
Ever seen a five legged buffalo? The cow on the right has a calf behind her and the cow on the left is young.

Shoot or Don't Shoot



If you were absolutely sure that this was a cow this would be a clear shot.

Shoot or Don't Shoot

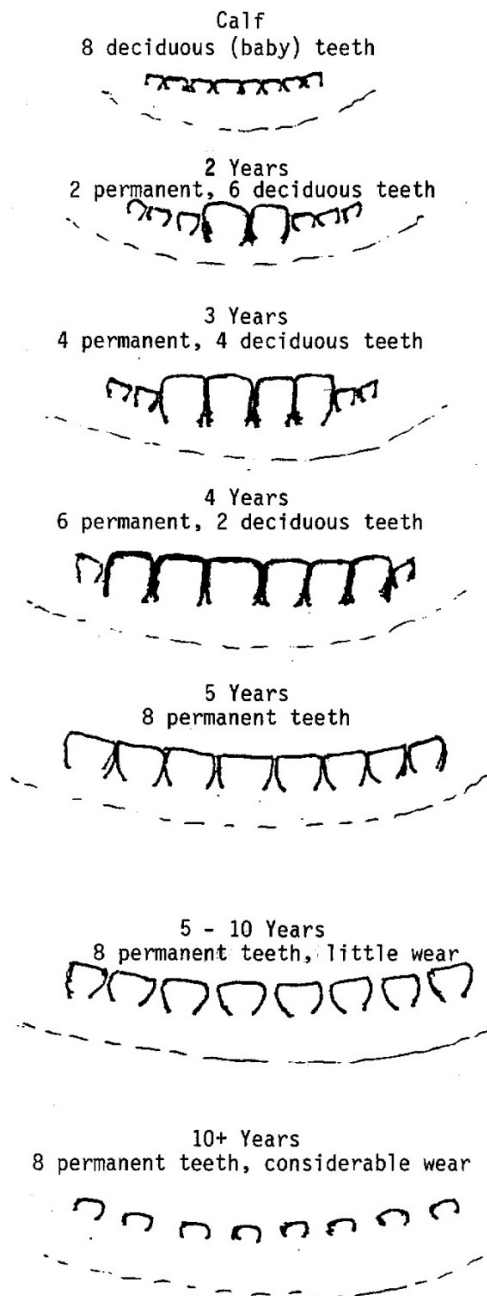


Another clear shot

Aging Bison Using Tooth Replacement

You will need to report the number of permanent teeth your buffalo has on the Mandatory Reporting Survey.

BISON AGE DETERMINATION BY TOOTH DEVELOPMENT



Like all cud chewing animals, the buffalo have no upper incisor teeth but rather a dental pad. The lower incisors act as a clipper against this pad as the animal feeds with a nose forward motion. These sketches show how these lower incisors can be used for age determination with reasonable accuracy up to about five years of age. There are methods for aging beyond five years using other teeth which we won't consider in this quick field guide.

Calves have their eight (four pairs) deciduous (baby) teeth soon after birth. The first pair of permanent teeth will replace the center pair of baby teeth during the second year of life and are usually up "in wear" by the second birthday. The second pair of permanents are in by the third birthday, the third pair by the fourth birthday and the fourth pair - "full mouth" - by the fifth birthday. This pattern is similar to that of domestic cattle with the buffalo a little later in arriving at a full mouth.

As the animal gets older, the teeth wear down and the gums recede, giving the appearance of wider tooth spacing. In advanced age only root stubs may be present and some or all of the teeth may be gone. It would be unusual for a wild animal to survive for long at this stage.

There will be individual variations in tooth wear of older animals depending on range conditions, general health and other factors. Since most buffalo are born during the spring months, animals taken during the fall hunts will be mid-year in age and this might be considered in the age determination of the younger animals.

Helpful Hints to Ensure a Successful Overall Experience

- Hunter orange is not required when hunting bison unless there is another big game rifle hunt in progress. Because big game hunt overlaps exist please consult the proclamation to determine when hunter orange is required.
- Remember to tag your animal before the carcass is moved or you leave the site of kill.
- Remember to leave evidence of sex attached to the largest portion of the carcass.
- It is unlawful for a person to waste or permit to be wasted (spoiled) any protected wildlife or any part of them.
- Extreme care should be taken before you shoot. Cows can be hard to determine from some angles. If a mistake is made and a bull is taken, please contact the Help Stop Poaching Hotline at 1-800-662-3337 or the local sheriff or highway patrol dispatcher. They will send an officer to investigate. A decision on any action taken will be based upon the officer's investigation and the fact that you contacted the Division and did not allow the animal to waste.
- Remember leaving the animal to waste could result in 3rd degree Felony charges regardless of whether the death of the animal was an honest mistake or not. It is in your best interest to contact a Division conservation officer and report any mistakes.
- Report violations to the Help Stop Poaching Hotline: 1-800-662-DEER